

Jews and the Plague in the Medieval and Early Modern Period

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ASBI Torah on Tablet

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Source #1:

Paul Fürst, engraving, c. 1721, of a plague doctor of Marseilles (introduced as 'Dr Beaky of Rome'). His nose-case is filled with herbal material to keep off the plague.



Source #2:

The Confession of Agimet of Geneva, Châtel, October 10, 1348

Translated from the original Latin. Taken from: Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book*, 315-1791 (Cincinnati: The Sinai Press, 1938), 44-45.

The year of our Lord 1348.

On Friday, the 10th of the month of October, at Châtel, in the castle thereof, there occurred the judicial inquiry which was made by order of the court of the illustrious Prince, our lord, Amadeus, Count of Savoy, and his subjects against the Jews of both sexes who were there imprisoned, each one separately. This was done after public rumor had become current and a

strong clamor had arisen- because of the poison put by them into the wells, springs, and other things which the Christians use-demanding that they die, that they are able to be found guilty and, therefore, that they should be punished. Hence this their confession made in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons.

Agimet the Jew, who lived at Geneva and was arrested at Chatel, was there put to the torture a little and then he was released from it. And after a long time, having been subjected again to torture a little, he confessed in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons, who are later mentioned. To begin with it is clear that at the Lent just passed Pultus Clesis de Ranz had sent this very Jew to Venice to buy silks and other things for him. **When this came to the notice of Rabbi Peyret, a Jew of Chambéry who was a teacher of their law, he sent for this Agimet, for whom he had searched, and when he had come before him he said: "We have been informed that you are going to Venice to buy silk and other wares. Here I am giving you a little package of half a span in size which contains some prepared poison and venom in a thin, sewed leather-bag. Distribute it among the wells, cisterns, and springs about Venice and the other places to which you go, in order to poison the people who use the water of the aforesaid wells that will have been poisoned by you, namely, the wells in which the poison will have been placed."**

Agimet took this package full of poison and carried it with him to Venice, and when he came there he threw and scattered a portion of it into the well or cistern of fresh water which was there near the German House, in order to poison the people who use the water of that cistern. And he says that this is the only cistern of sweet water in the city. He also says that the mentioned Rabbi Peyret promised to give him whatever he wanted for his troubles in this business. Of his own accord Agimet confessed further that after this had been done he left at once in order that he should not be captured by the citizens or others, and that he went personally to Calabria and Apulia and threw the above mentioned poison into many wells. He confesses also that he put some of this same poison in the well of the streets of the city of Ballet.

He confesses further that he put some of this poison into the public fountain of the city of Toulouse and in the wells that are near the [Mediterranean] sea. Asked if at the time that he scattered the venom and poisoned the wells, above mentioned, any people had died, he said that he did not know inasmuch as he had left everyone of the above mentioned places in a hurry. Asked if any of the Jews of those places were guilty in the above mentioned matter, he answered that he did not know. And now by all that which is contained in the five books of Moses and the scroll of the Jews, he declared that this was true, and that he was in no wise lying, no matter what might happen to him.

Source #3:

The Cremation of Strasbourg Jewry, St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 1349

From a chronicle written by Jacob von Königshofen (1346-1420)

Translated from the original German. Taken from: Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book, 315-1791* (Cincinnati: The Sinai Press, 1938), 45–47.

In the year 1349 there occurred the greatest epidemic that ever happened. Death went from one end of the earth to the other, on that side and this side of the sea, and it was greater among the Saracens than among the Christians. In some lands everyone died so that no one was left. Ships were also found on the sea laden with wares; the crew had all died and no one guided the ship. The Bishop of Marseilles and priests and monks and more than half of all the people there died with them. In other kingdoms and cities so many people perished that it would be horrible to describe. The pope at Avignon stopped all sessions of court, locked himself in a room, allowed no one to approach him and had a fire burning before him all the time. [This last was probably intended as some sort of disinfectant.] And from what this epidemic came, all wise teachers and physicians could only say that it was God's will. And as the plague was now here, so was it in other places, and lasted more than a whole year. This epidemic also came to Strasbourg in the summer of the above mentioned year, and it is estimated that about sixteen thousand people died.

In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells - that is what they were accused of - and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there. Nevertheless they tortured a number of Jews in Berne and Zofingen [Switzerland] who then admitted that they had put poison into many wells, and they also found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns and wrote of this affair to Strasbourg, Freiburg, and Basel in order that they too should burn their Jews. But the leaders in these three cities in whose hands the government lay did not believe that anything ought to be done to the Jews. However in Basel the citizens marched to the city-hall and compelled the council to take an oath that they would burn the Jews, and that they would allow no Jew to enter the city for the next two hundred years. Thereupon the Jews were arrested in all these places and a conference was arranged to meet at Benfeld [Alsace, February 8, 1349]. The Bishop of Strasbourg [Berthold II], all the feudal lords of Alsace, and representatives of the three above mentioned cities came there. The deputies of the city of Strasbourg were asked what they were going to do with their Jews. They answered and said that they knew no evil of them. Then they asked the Strasbourgers why they had closed the wells and put away the buckets, and there was a great indignation and clamor against the deputies from Strasbourg. So finally the Bishop and the lords and the Imperial Cities agreed to do away with the Jews. The result was that they were burnt in many cities, and

wherever they were expelled they were caught by the peasants and stabbed to death or drowned...

[The town-council of Strasbourg which wanted to save the Jews was deposed on the 9th-10th of February, and the new council gave in to the mob, who then arrested the Jews on Friday, the 13th.]

THE JEWS ARE BURNT

On Saturday - that was St. Valentine's Day - they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. [Some say that about a thousand accepted baptism.] Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors.

Thus were the Jews burnt at Strasbourg, and in the same year in all the cities of the Rhine, whether Free Cities or Imperial Cities or cities belonging to the lords. In some towns they burnt the Jews after a trial, in others, without a trial. In some cities the Jews themselves set fire to their houses and cremated themselves.

THE JEWS RETURN TO STRASBOURG

It was decided in Strasbourg that no Jew should enter the city for a hundred years, but before twenty years had passed, the council and magistrates agreed that they ought to admit the Jews again into the city for twenty years. And so the Jews came back again to Strasbourg in the year 1368 after the birth of our Lord.

Source #4:

Sicut Judeis (Mandate to Protect the Jews)

Pope Clement VI

October 1, 1348

Translated from the original Latin. Taken from: John Aberth, *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 158-59.

Even though we justly detest the perfidy of the Jews, who, persisting in their stubbornness, refuse to interpret correctly the sayings of the prophets and the secret words of their own writings and take notice of Christian faith and salvation, we nevertheless are mindful of our duty to shelter the Jews, by reason of the fact that our Savior, when he assumed mortal flesh for the salvation of the human race, deemed it worthy to be born of Jewish stock, and for the sake of humanity in that the Jews have called upon the assistance of our protection and the clemency of Christian piety. . . . **Recently, however, it has come to our attention by public fame, or rather infamy, that some Christians out of rashness have impiously slain several of the Jews, without respect to age or sex, after falsely blaming the pestilence on poisonings by Jews, said to be in league with the devil, when in fact it is the result of an angry God striking at the Christian people for their sins. And it is the assertion of many that some of these Christians are chasing after their own profit and are blinded by greed in getting rid of the Jews, because they owe great sums of money to them.** And we have heard that although the Jews are prepared to submit to judgment before a competent judge concerning this preposterous crime, nevertheless this is not enough to stem Christian violence, but rather their fury rages even more. As long as their error is not corrected, it seems to be approved. **And although we would wish that the Jews be suitably and severely punished should perchance they be guilty of or accessories to such an outrageous crime, for which any penalty that could be devised would barely be sufficient, nevertheless it does not seem credible that the Jews on this occasion are responsible for the crime nor that they caused it, because this nearly universal pestilence, in accordance with God's hidden judgment, has afflicted and continues to afflict the Jews themselves, as well as many other races who had never been known to live alongside them, throughout the various regions of the world.**

We order all of you by apostolic writing, and each of you in particular who will be asked to do so, to warn your subjects, both the clergy and the people, during the service of the mass in your churches, and to expressly enjoin them on pain of excommunication, which you may then inflict on those who transgress, that they are not to presume to seize, strike, wound, or kill Jews, no matter what the occasion or by what authority (more likely their own rashness), or to demand of them forced labor. But we do not by these presents deprive anyone of the power to proceed justly against the Jews, which they may do concerning this or any other excesses committed by them, provided that they have grounds for proceeding against them, either in this or any other business, and that they do so before competent judges and follow judicial procedure.

Source #5:

Qinah, written by Emanuel ben Joseph in Spain. 14th century.

Text and translation taken from: Susan L. Einbinder, *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration Among Iberian Jews* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 38–40.

Parma Biblioteca Palatina Heb. 1929, 1935;
IMHM Microfilms F 13085, F 13090 fol. 71b
Emanuel b. Joseph S^oShNA

מרתיה קודם תגלה

אָקונן בַּמֶּרֶה וְצוֹם וְעֶצְרָה עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הַנְּבִיאִים
נְבָרִים קְדוֹשִׁים וְקִנְיִם יְשִׁישִׁים אֲדוֹנִים קָשִׁים [1] בַּמִּסְגֵּר מִבֵּינֵם
יֵרֵד הַדֶּרֶם וְחֶשֶׁךְ מֵאוֹרֶם וְאַרְצוֹת מְגוֹרֶם אוֹתָם מְקִיָּאִים
עֲזוּבִים לְחוּרֵב מְנוּיִם [2] לְחֶרֶב בָּקָר וְעֶרֶב בְּפִיּוֹת לְבָאִים
מְרוּדִים [3] בִּידֵי נוֹגֶשׁ וְרוּדָה וְרַחֵק פּוֹדָה וְגִבְרוּ מִשְׁנָאִים
נִתּוּשִׁי [4] חוֹמָה טְרוּדִים בְּחֶמְהָ לְקֶצְוִי אֲדָמָה וְאַל גּוֹי שְׂבָאִים [5]
וְשִׁדְדוֹ נֹהֵם לַעֲיִנֵּיהֶם [6] וְכָל קִנְיָנֵיהֶם בְּתִים מְלֵאִים
אֲחֻזּוֹם בְּמִקְשָׁם [7] מְבַקְשֵׁי נֶפֶשׁ וְיִשְׁחָטוּם שֵׁם כְּעֶדְרֵי טְלָאִים
לְחוּצִים בְּדִלּוֹת אֲמִלִּים בְּשִׁפְלוֹת כָּלֶם בְּגִלּוֹת יִהְיוּ אֵךְ נְכָאִים [8]
בָּנִים אֲהוּבִים בְּחֻצוֹת סְחוּבִים וְאַבּוֹת כּוֹאֲבִים בְּמוֹתָם רוֹאִים
נְעִימִים כְּשׁוֹחַר עוֹרֶם שָׁחַר וּמֵתוֹ אַחֵר מְמוֹתֵי הַלָּאִים
יְמוֹתָם סָפוּ יְדֵיהֶם רָפוּ יוֹם נִגְפּוּ לִפְנֵי טְמָאִים [9]
וְכָשְׁלוּ רִגְלֵי שְׁבּוּי וְגוֹלָה בְּמִדְבָּר מְלֵא פִגְרֵי רָפָאִים
סָר צֶל הוֹדֶם וְשִׁפְלָה כְּבוֹדֶם וְהִלְכוּ בְּאִידֶם רַעֲבִים צְמָאִים
פְּנֵיהֶם קָדְרוּ וַיִּתְּנִיכּוּ בְּחַיִּים נִקְבְּרוּ יָרְדוּ פְּלָאִים
סָמוּךְ נִפְלְתָם צוּר כְּפֹזֶרֶתָם הָאֵר אֶפְלָתָם יוֹצֵר בְּרוּאִים
טָהַר לְבָבָם וַיִּשֶׁר נְתִיבָם וּמַחֲוֹת לְחוּבָם וְהַעֲבֵר חֲטָאִים [10]
שָׁעָה שְׁנֵעַתָּם מְקוֹם מִנְחָתָם וְדָם חֲטָאָתָם וְחֵלֶב [11] מְרִיאִים
נָחָה עִמָּךְ יְהִי כְּנֹאמִיךָ לְמִקְדָּשְׁךָ שְׁמִיךָ [12] וְשׁוּבוּן פְּדוּאִים
[אֲשֶׁרִי אֲמוּנִים בְּיָהּ מֵאֲמִינִים וְאֲשֶׁרִי בָנִים עִם אֵל קְרוּאִים] [13]

הערות:

- [1] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, אנשים ונשים.
- [2] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, מטים לחרב.
- [3] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, מסורים.
- [4] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, נתוצי.
- [5] בדפוס, "גיא שבאים" ועיין יואל ד:ח, גם "גיא שמנים" ביש' כח:א,ד.
- [6] למול עיניהם – חסרה הברה אחת.
- [7] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, אחוזים ביוקשם.
- [8] הברה מיותרת.
- [9] חסרה הברה אחת.
- [10] שורה זו חסרה בלאנדסהוט וברנפלד.
- [11] לאנדסהאוט וברנשטיין, כחלב.
- [12] לאנדסהוט וברנשטיין, הדומיך. ויש פה הברה מיותרת.
- [13] השורה חסרה בכתב היד אבל מופיעה בברנפלד ובלנדסהאוט.

I lamented [to the melody of] “Before You reveal”:

1. I shall lament in bitterness, fasting, and prayer, on behalf of the Torah and prophets.
2. Saintly men, pure of heart, and venerable elders were imprisoned by harsh lords.
3. Their glory dwindled, their radiance dimmed; the land where they dwelled spit them out.
4. They were left desolate, appointed for the sword; morning and evening in the mouths of lions.
5. [They were] brought down by attackers and oppressors. Their redeemer is distant while those who hate them grew strong.
6. Their wall destroyed, they were driven by anger to the ends of the earth, to a nation of captors.
7. Before their eyes, they plundered their homes, houses filled with belongings.
8. Those who sought their lives trapped them and slaughtered them like flocks of lambs.
9. They were pressed in poverty, wretched in baseness; all were sent into exile uttering wails and grief.
10. Beloved sons were dragged in the streets, and aching fathers saw their deaths.
11. They had been radiant as the dawn, [but now] their skin turned black. They died of deadly diseases.
12. Their days ended, their grasp weakened, the day they were struck down before the impure ones.
13. The feet of captive and exile stumbled in a wilderness full of ghostly corpses.
14. The Glory that had shaded them departed, their honor fell. In their misfortune, they went in hunger and thirst.
15. Their faces grew dark and unrecognizable. They were buried alive; they had a terrible descent.
16. Catch their fall, O Rock, just as You scattered them! Illumine their darkness, Creator of all!
17. *Purify their hearts and straighten their path; wipe out their debt and take away [their] sins.*
18. Hear their cry in place of their sacrifice, the blood of the sin-offering, the fat of calves.
19. Lead Your people, O God, as You have spoken, to Your heavenly Temple; let them return redeemed.
20. Happy are those who have total faith in the Lord, and happy are the children who are called the people of God!

Source #6:

Life of Judah: Autobiography of Leon Modena

Translation taken from: Mark R. Cohen, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 134–37.

[5]391 [1630/1631]. From that time on the pestilence began to spread all over. The hand of God weighed heavily on the Jews throughout Italy, bringing war, famine, and plague. The sorrows that befell the holy community of Mantua had not been felt since the time of the destruction of the Temple, and the holy community of Modena was almost destroyed by the pestilence. Then it reached Venice, and after it began in the Ghetto Vecchio with Moses Tzarfati of blessed memory, during the Days of Repentance [September 7-16, 1630]; and during Sukkot [September 21-29, 1630] with Jacob Cohen, known as Scocco, it spread further, until by today, the beginning of the month of Second Adar 5391 [March 5, 1631], about 170 people have died. There has been great panic in the various congregations, and many, especially the Sephardim, have left the city for the Levant or for Verona.

...

Indeed, He has continuously protected me, for His hand has struck all the surrounding dwellings, and even the [apartments on the] staircase where I live. Above and below me and on all sides, left and right, people have taken ill and died from the plague. But to this day God has not allowed the agent of destruction to enter my apartment to cause affliction. May He not abandon or desert me or the members of my household. Amen.

Between the beginning of the month of Second Adar [March 5, 1631] and the 11th of Sivan [June 12, 1631], even though the pestilence had increased in severity in every quarter of the city, God made a wondrous division between their camp and the camp of Israel, and nobody became ill or died in the two ghettos. The gentiles were astonished at this wondrous thing. Only we Jews did not appreciate the miracle wrought for us, and people in our communities continued to do evil in the sight of God by quarreling, slandering, stealing, cursing, lying, and swearing falsely. Thus God's anger was kindled against His people, and [they] began to be afflicted [by the plague] on the 11th of Sivan. He did not relent and heal them, however, and once again, many people began to die in both ghettos. Nonetheless, the death toll among the Jews never reached the mortality in the rest of the city. It was not so in the communities of Verona and Padua, for God's hand struck them, and less than one-third survived. No one escaped, for there was not a house without its dead. May the Merciful One have pity on his creatures.

...

As mentioned before, the plague continued in the city and among the Jews through Heshvan 5392 [November 1631]. Then God in his great mercy took pity, and the bitterness of death was turned away. There was great celebration in the city, and everyone gave

thanks to his God. In addition, a fast was decreed in all the holy congregations for the eve [Tuesday evening, November 25, 1631] of the new moon of Kislev, with a prayer service for the new moon during the day [Wednesday, November 26], including [the prayer] “Nishmat Kol Hai” and with the pleasant sound of joyfulness. A collection was taken up in every synagogue, which will be used to make a silver object to commemorate the deliverance. Blessed is He who redeems and saves, blessed is He and blessed is His name.

Source #7: See pages at the end

Glikl of Hameln (1646-1724)

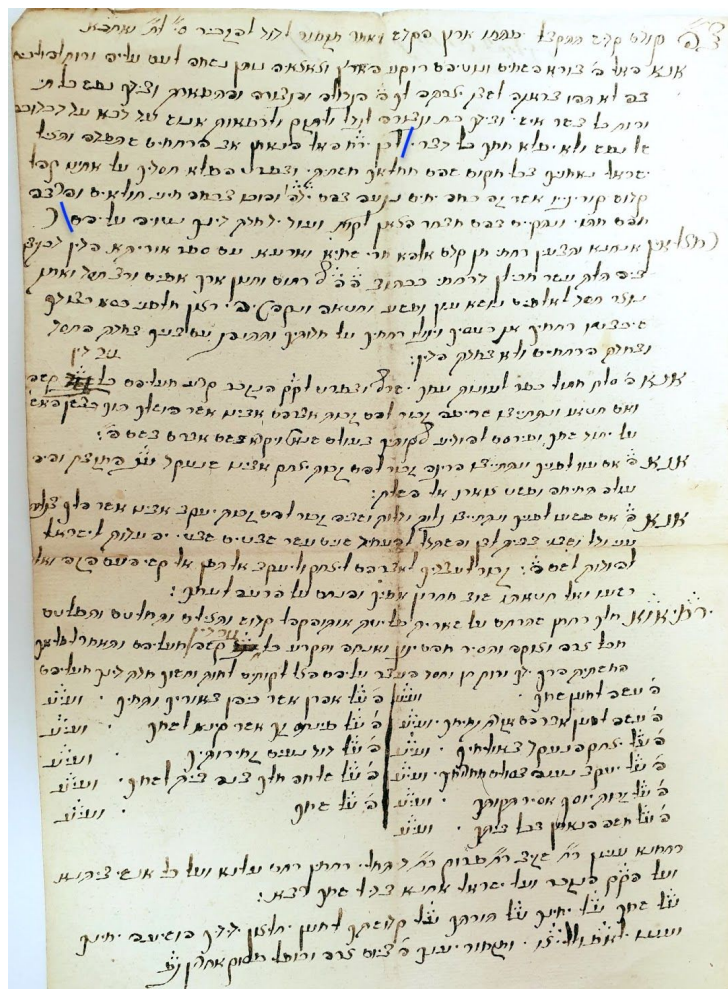
Taken from: Chava Turniansky, ed., *Glikl Memoirs 1691-1719*, trans. Sara Friedman (Chicago: Brandeis University Press, 2019), 106–13.

Source #8:

A prayer against plagues in Correggio, Northern Italy, 17th Century

From the collection of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem

Translation my own

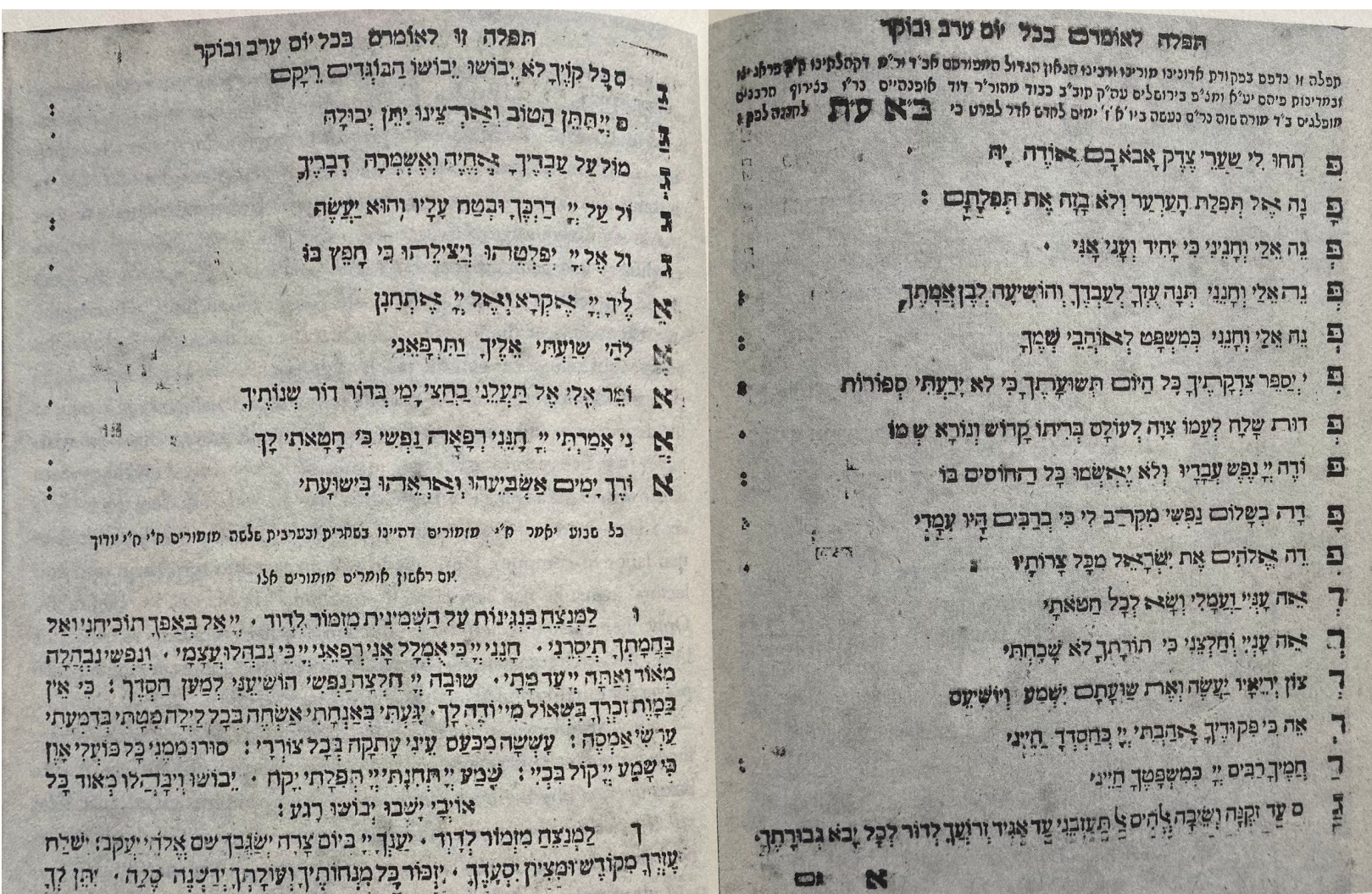


יר"מ [יהי ירצון מלפניך] האל הנאמן, אב
הרחמים, שתפדה ותציל ישראל נאמנים בכל
מקום שהם ממלאך משחית. ובפרט הפלא
חסדיך על אחינו קהל קדוש קורייגיו, אשר זה
כמה ימים נקמה בהם יד ה', והוכו בכמה מיני
חולאים, והרבה מהם מתו. ונתקיים בהם:
מבחר הצאן לקוח, ועוד יד מדת דינך נטויה
עליהם.

May it be your will, the Faithful God,
Father of Mercy, that You should
redeem and save the faithful Israel,
wherever they are, from the
destroying angel. And specifically
deploy (amaze?) your kindness upon
our brothers the holy community of
Correggio, who these last few days
the hand of God has taken revenge
upon them, and they were afflicted
with multiple different illnesses, and
many among them died. And let the
verse be fulfilled with them (Ezekiel
24:5): “Take the best of the flock...”
but the hand of Your attribute of
justice is still outstretched upon them.

Source #9:

Prayer Commissioned by Rabbi David Oppenheim (1664-1736), Chief Rabbi of Prague, 1713.



Let me then conclude this matter for the time being and begin again.³⁹ When I gave birth to my daughter Matte, rumors started spreading in Hamburg that there was, God preserve us!, a plague in town, heaven forfend!⁴⁰ The plague worsened and three or four Jewish homes were contaminated, due to our many sins, and all the inhabitants died one by one until the houses stood practically empty. It was a time of great distress; the dead were treated very poorly,⁴¹ God preserve us. Most of the households moved from Hamburg to Altona, with pledges worth several thousand reichstaler; the pledges ranged in worth from ten to thirty reichstaler, and even one hundred reichstaler, because a pawnshop has to give loans against pledges worth eight schillings just as against those worth twenty reichstaler. The plague—heaven forfend!—spread to the entire city, God preserve us, and the residents gave us no peace. Although we knew they were infected, we had to allow them to redeem their pledges; had we moved to Altona, they would have followed us there too. So we decided to go to Hamel with our small children, since my father-in-law, of blessed memory, was living there at the time.⁴² One day after Yom Kippur we straightaway left Hamburg, reaching Hannover one day before the Festival of Sukkot.⁴³ We stayed with my brother-in-law, our master and teacher R. Avraham, who was still living in Hannover then.⁴⁴ Since the festival was about to begin, they did not want to let us continue on our journey. So we spent Sukkot in Hannover. With me were my daughter Tsipor, four years old, and my son Nathan, two years old, may they live long, and my daughter Matte, of blessed memory, who was about eight weeks old. My brother-in-law Reb Leyb Han-

39. Here Glikl returns to the birth of her daughter, Matte, which was previously mentioned (see this Book, p. 103) and served as the point of departure for the account of Shabtai Tzvi.

40. This expression is used to ward off the evil previously mentioned. According to Feilchenfeld, the plague commenced in July 1664 (see Feilchenfeld 1913, p. 63, n. 8), but this date does not accord with the chronology in the narrative: Glikl's daughter Matte was eight weeks old when the family fled from Hamburg due to the plague (see following text). According to Glikl, Matte was born before Shabtai Tzvi became a topic of discussion, that is, at the end of 1665 (on chronological issues, see Marwedel 2001b).

41. On the problems of burying the dead during a plague, see Turniansky 1988, pp. 194–195.

42. Hence, the plague occurred before her father-in-law moved to Hildesheim (see this Book, n. 34).

43. This means that they traveled for three days. See map for the route from Hamburg to Hamel, which passes through Hannover.

44. Later on, R. Avraham, the brother of Glikl's husband, moved to Hamel (see Book Two, p. 89).

nover⁴⁵ invited us to spend the first days of Sukkot with him; there was a synagogue in Reb Leyb's house. On the holiday, my husband, of blessed memory, was in the synagogue, while I was downstairs in the heated room, about to dress my daughter Tsipor.

I must write of a small misfortune that we had when my husband, of blessed memory, was still alive, and of other troublesome cares that often cannot be expressed in words, especially now, alas. Who can I complain to now, who can I tell this to? We have *no one to rely upon but our Father in Heaven*⁴⁶ to help us and the rest of Israel and *He gives us joy for as long as He has afflicted us*.⁴⁷ It is true that even during my husband's lifetime we had worries here and there because of *the pain of bringing up children*;⁴⁸ some of these can be told, others should not or cannot be told. But my beloved companion could console me for all my troubles, and when all my cares were upon me, his comforting words eased all my woes. But who will console me now? Who will listen to the anguished thoughts of a sad heart, as my dear beloved husband said even on his deathbed, less than half an hour before his pure soul expired. My pious mother fell across his bed weeping, saying: "My dear son-in-law, don't you want to tell me something or give me some instructions?" He replied: "Mother dear, I don't know what to say or what instructions to give, just that you console my poor Gliklchen." After that he wished to say no more, as will be told later, in the proper place.⁴⁹ So who will console me? To whom can I pour out my bitter distress, where can I turn? Right now I am simply drowning in troubles and black thoughts, woe is me! Indeed, several bad things happened to us, as recounted next. This too was a real misfortune, which kind God promptly removed, in His gracious compassion.

Let me begin once more from where I left off. While I was dressing my daughter Tsipor, may she live long, the girl twisted in my arms at my touch. I say: "Dearest Tsipor, what's bothering you?" The girl says: "Mother dear-

45. Leyb Hannover was the husband of Esther, the sister of Glikl's husband (see Book Two, p. 83, n. 149).

46. Cf. m.Sotah 9:15 (beraita). See also Book One, n. 64.

47. Cf. Ps 90:15.

48. Cf. b.Shabbat 89b; b.Eruvin 100b.

49. For the description of the situation, see Book Five, p. 199.

est, I have a terrible pain under my arm.” So I look to see what she had there, and I see a suppurating sore under her arm.⁵⁰ My maid was with me there. When my husband, of blessed memory, had a similar small sore, a barber-surgeon⁵¹ in Hannover dressed it with a small bandage. So I tell the maid: “Go to Chaim—he’s upstairs in the synagogue—and ask him which barber-surgeon he went to and where he lives. Take the girl there for him to bandage her arm.”

I was not thinking of anything bad. The maid enters the synagogue and asks my husband, of blessed memory, where the barber-surgeon lived, and he tells her. In order to get to the men’s section, you have to pass through the women’s section. The maid was just walking out when my late sisters-in-law Yente, Sulke, and Esther,⁵² who were sitting in the synagogue, ask her: “What were you doing in the men’s section?” The maid replies innocently, she too not thinking of anything bad: “Our little girl has a sore under her arm, so I asked my employer which barber-surgeon treated him for his sore. I’ll take the child there.” The women were immediately terrified, being big cowards about such matters anyway, given that we had come from Hamburg under such a threat.⁵³ Well, they leaned their heads together and discussed it. Now, in the synagogue there was also an old Polish woman, a guest.⁵⁴ She overhears the story and sees how frightened my sisters-in-law are, so she says: “Don’t be frightened, nothing will happen. I’ve been dealing with this kind of business for over twenty years. If you like, I’ll go downstairs to examine the little girl. I’ll tell you right away if it’s dangerous, God forbid, and what you have to do.” “Yes, for God’s sake, go examine her well so that we do not endanger ourselves, God forbid!” they said.

I knew nothing of all this. The old Polish woman comes downstairs, say-

50. This was a characteristic symptom of the plague.

51. On barber-surgeons, see Book Two, p. 88, n. 117.

52. Yente was the sister of Glikl’s husband, the widow of Zalman Gans, and the wife of Lipman Cohen; Sulke was the wife of R. Avraham, the brother of Glikl’s husband; and Esther—the sister of Glikl’s husband and the wife of Leyb Hannover (see Family Tree B).

53. Referring to their fear of the plague, which caused Glikl’s family to leave Hamburg (see this Book, p. 106 and elsewhere), and clearly the child’s sore increased this fear.

54. This Jewish woman, as well as the Polish man mentioned later on (this Book, p. 110, n. 61) were two of the many “itinerant mendicants” from Poland who visited Ashkenazi communities during this period (see Halpern 1968, p. 409, explanation 2).

ing, “Where is the little girl?” “Why?” I say. She says: “I am a healer.”⁵⁵ I’ll give the girl something that will make her feel better immediately.” Fearing nothing, I lead the girl to her; she examines the little girl then dashes away from her back upstairs to the women, causing panic among them, and tells the women: “Run away, all of you who can flee, for you have, alas, the genuine plague in the house. The little girl has the genuine pestilence, heaven forbid!”

Well, easy to imagine the commotion and screaming among the women, especially such big cowards. Men and women all left the synagogue at a run, right in the middle of the most important prayers on the holy festival day, mercy upon us. Hastily they thrust the maid and the little girl out the door; no one wanted them in the house, and they would not let them inside. It’s easy to understand how we felt. I kept crying and screaming, begging, in God’s name: “My friends, think twice of what you are doing. My daughter has nothing wrong with her. You can see for yourselves that my daughter is healthy and well, thank God. The girl had a head cold with runny nose, poor thing. Before leaving Hamburg I applied some ointment, and it went from her head to the sore. When you catch something like this,”⁵⁶ God forbid, you get ten different symptoms.⁵⁷ Just look, my child is running around in the street eating a roll.” But all to no avail. “If this gets out,” they said, “and His Excellency the Duke hears that there is such a thing in his city,”⁵⁸ God forbid, what a catastrophe it will be!” The old woman stood before me and said right to my face that she was prepared to put her head on the block if it turned out that the child had nothing whatsoever wrong with her. What were we to do? I pleaded: “For pity’s sake, let me stay with the child. Wherever my child goes, I go too. Let me go to her!” But they refused this too. In short, my brothers-in-law, our master and teacher R. Avraham Segal, Reb Lipman, and Reb Leyb immediately sat down to consult with their wives to see what could be done: where to hide the maid and the girl; how to keep it from the authorities. We would all be

55. A woman who cares for sick people using traditional medicine.

56. Glikl avoids mentioning the term “plague.”

57. For the ten symptoms of the plague, see Katz 1707, 129b.

58. Hannover was the *Residenzstadt* of the duke (Herzog), who was from the young dynasty of the house of Braunschweig-Lüneburg (see Feilchenfeld 1913, p. 67, n. 11a).

in grave danger, God help us, if the duke found out. It was decided to dress the maid and the girl in old tattered rags and send them to a village less than the Sabbath limit's distance from Hannover — the village was called Hainholz⁵⁹ — there they would go to the home of one of the villagers, saying that the Jews of Hannover would not invite them to spend the festival days with them, on the grounds that there were already too many beggars in Hannover, and would not let them enter the city. They wished therefore to spend the holy days in the village, staying with them and compensating them for their trouble. "We're sure that they will send us food and drink⁶⁰ from Hannover; they would not leave us without food and make us suffer hunger on the holy days."

There was an old man from Poland⁶¹ staying in Hannover. We hired this man to go with the old Polish woman and accompany the maid and the little girl for a few days until we knew how things stood. However, the two of them refused to budge before being paid thirty reichstaler in cash for putting themselves at such risk. So my brothers-in-law our master and teacher R. Avraham Segal, Reb Lipman, and Reb Leyb sat down to discuss with the Hannover community's teacher, who was also a scholar,⁶² whether it was permitted to desecrate the festival by giving them money on the holy day. Finally they agreed among themselves to pay them, saying it was a time of peril and lives were at stake.⁶³ So — we were to send our dear little girl away on the holy festival day and pretend we believed there was something wrong with her, God forbid. I will let any good father or mother judge for themselves how we felt. My husband, of blessed memory, stood in a corner, *weeping and pleading*, while I stood in the other.⁶⁴ Surely it was thanks to my devout husband's good deeds that God heeded him, as is written "*and the Lord responded to his plea*."⁶⁵ I do not believe that our father Abraham

59. Today a suburb of Hannover (see Landau 1901, p. 66 and map).

60. Most certainly due to kashrut (Jewish dietary laws) considerations.

61. A Jewish "itinerant mendicant," as the Polish woman mentioned earlier (see this Book, n. 54).

62. Since this refers to a scholarly discussion on the Jewish law, the scholar was included.

63. According to the rule in Jewish law that "saving a life takes precedence over the Sabbath."

64. Cf. Rashi's commentary on Gen 25:21: "This man stands in a corner and prays and this woman stands in a corner and prays." (see also the following note and Feilchenfeld 1913, p. 69, n. 14); "weeping and pleading," cf. Hos 12:5.

65. Cf. Gen 25:21.

felt any more pain at the binding of Isaac than we did at that moment; for our father Abraham acted on divine command, out of love for God, blessed be He, therefore he bore his misery cheerfully. But as for us, this blow came when we were among strangers⁶⁶ and weighed down our hearts. But what can you do? We must bear it all, *just as one says a blessing for a good hap, so should he say one for an evil hap.*⁶⁷ I dressed my maid in clothes turned inside-out and bundled up a few things for the child, tying the bundle on the maid as if she were a beggar-woman. I dressed the poor girl in old tattered rags too; they walked along in this way, my good maid and my beloved little girl with the old man and old woman to the village.

It's easy to imagine the nature of the priestly blessing⁶⁸ we said upon parting from the girl, and how we shed hundreds of tears at leaving her. Although the girl was as cheerful and gay as any child who understands nothing, poor thing, we all — all of us in Hannover — were *weeping and pleading*,⁶⁹ and we spent the holy day in sadness.

And so they went to the village and were welcomed at their lodgings in the home of one of the villagers, since they had money, and money always helps. The villager asked them: "Isn't today your festival day? Why then aren't you staying with the Jews?" Their answer was that there were already many beggars in Hannover, so they had been denied entry to the city; yet they were sure that the Jews of Hannover would send them food during the holy days.

We returned together to the synagogue, but the services were already over. Reb Yudah Berliner was in Hannover at that time, still a bachelor,⁷⁰ and had been doing some business with us. There was also someone called Reb Michl⁷¹ there, a young man from Poland who taught the children.⁷²

66. That is, outside of Hamburg, their hometown.

67. Cf. b.Berakhot 48b, 54a; m.Berakhot 9:5.

68. When parting from friends and relatives, Ashkenazi Jews used to recite the priestly blessing (Num 6:24–27). This is the source of the saying "*birkas kohanim nachsagen*." See Sadan 1975, vol. 2, pp. 9–11; Feilchenfeld 1913, p. 70, n. 15; Tendlaw 1860, p. 361.

69. See this Book, n. 64.

70. As mentioned earlier in this Book, Reb Yudah was then in Hannover looking for a match.

71. "Michl" or "Mechl" is the "secular" version of the Hebrew name Yecheiel. The combination "Yecheiel-Michl" was prevalent among Polish Jews (see following text).

72. Teachers of young children (*melamdin*) from Poland in Hamburg and throughout Germany were a widespread phenomenon in Ashkenaz at that time; see Book Five, pp. 223–224.

He later married a woman from Hildesheim, where he lives now, a well-respected, wealthy man, and a leader of the Hildesheim community. This same Reb Michl was also a part-time servant, as is the custom in Ashkenaz, where young men such as he are employed to teach the children. When we left the synagogue, Reb Leyb sent for us to come to the meal, for, as I mentioned, he had invited us to stay in his house on the eve of the festival; but it is not hard to imagine how we felt. My husband, of blessed memory, said: "Before we eat anything, I must bring some food to my little girl and to the others — it is a festival day, after all." They said: "Yes, obviously, you're right, none of us will eat a thing until some food is brought to those outside," for it was very close to Hannover, the same distance as from Altona to Hamburg. So some food was collected; everybody contributed something. But who would take it to them? Everyone was reluctant. Said Reb Yudah: "I'll take it to them." "I'll go with him," said Reb Michl; my husband, of blessed memory, accompanied them too, because he loved the little girl so dearly. But the people of Hannover did not trust my husband, thinking: "If he goes with them, he won't be able to help going near the child." So my brother-in-law Reb Lipman was obliged to accompany them too.

So they all went together to bring the food. The maid with the girl and their escort⁷³ were so hungry that they had gone to take a walk in the fields, poor things. When the poor girl saw my husband, of blessed memory, she was filled with joy and wanted to run to her father, as any child would. Reb Lipman, my brother-in-law, shouted out to them to hold the girl, that the old man should come get the food. They had to restrain my husband too, as with a rope, to keep him from approaching the dear child. Now both he and the little girl were wailing, because my husband, of blessed memory, could see that she was safe and sound, thank God, but he was not permitted to go to her. They therefore placed the food and drink on the grass, and the maid and her escort went to get it. Then my husband, of blessed memory, left with his companions. It went on like this until Shmini Atzeret.⁷⁴ The old man and old woman had bandages and ointment for

73. Meaning the old Polish man and woman who accompanied the child and the servant (see earlier).

74. Shmini Atzeret ("the assembly of the eighth day") directly follows the festival of Sukkot, which is celebrated for seven days.

dressing the sore, and it healed nicely. Indeed, the child was healthy and well, gamboling around the field like a young ram. We said to the Hannoverians: “What was the point of your nonsense? You see that our little girl is healthy and well, thank God, and presents no danger whatsoever, thank God. Let the poor child come back here.” Once again they held a consultation but decided not to allow the little girl and her escorts to return to Hannover before Simḥat Torah.⁷⁵ What could we do? We had to accept this as well. On Simḥat Torah, then, Reb Michl went to fetch the girl and her escorts and bring them back to Hannover. Anyone could see our joy, mine and my husband’s, of blessed memory, and that of all those present, until all could not help weeping with joy. *The eye weeps and the heart rejoices.*⁷⁶ They all wanted to gobble her up⁷⁷ — never was there such a beautiful, gracious child. For a long time the girl was called nothing but “the Maiden of Hainholz.” And so, my dear children, this unfortunate incident ended well, in joy and happiness; we cannot praise and thank God Almighty enough for this, for showing me, his unworthy servant, such gracious compassion. Were I to write ten books, still I could not describe everything. For in everything that great, gracious God causes to happen to me I see and feel His great compassion.

I will not recount all the various sicknesses, God preserve us, that I often had to endure with my dear children, until many times I wished I could sacrifice half of what I have for my children to be restored to health. But the one righteous God aided me in His mercy, truly in the blink of an eye, with such compassion that I knew not where the suffering had gone. God the righteous removed our burdensome affliction of so many years, the cause of such anxiety, all at once, and restored our child safe and sound; for this we will forever and ever give thanks to God above. May almighty God continue thus. See what our faithful God does: when we feel utterly helpless and disconsolate, He comes to our aid, just when we least expect it. And since we do not merit this, it must surely be due to the mercy of the heavenly Father. For I, a sinner, consider myself unworthy of

75. Simḥat Torah (“rejoicing in the Torah”), celebrated the day after Shmini Atzeret (see previous note).

76. For possible sources of this expression, see Turniansky 2006a, p. 232, n. 128.

77. Idiomatic expression used to highlight the amazement that the girl arouses in those who see her.